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ABSTRACT

This handbook provides direct, detailed instructions for involving a variety of adults (teachers, teacher aides, volunteers, and parents) in team teaching young children. The handbook describes specific ways to promote positive relationships among children and among the adult team members, and how to avoid common mistakes when giving feedback. Following a list of the benefits of team teaching and a checklist of items related to the team teaching process, sections of the handbook deal with the following topics: helping children learn, get along with each other, and follow rules; tracking children's needs, interests, and progress; fostering communication and feedback among team members; and involving parents as team members. In each section, specific examples are used to illustrate and emphasize the importance of adults working together to enhance the learning environment for young children. (MM)

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A Guide to Team Teaching in Early Childhood Education

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A GUIDE TO TEAM TEACHING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Prepared by Marjorie J. Kostelnik
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Parents

Teachers

Administrators

Specialists

Volunteers

Support Staff

Working Together
Teaching Young Children

TEAM MEMBERS

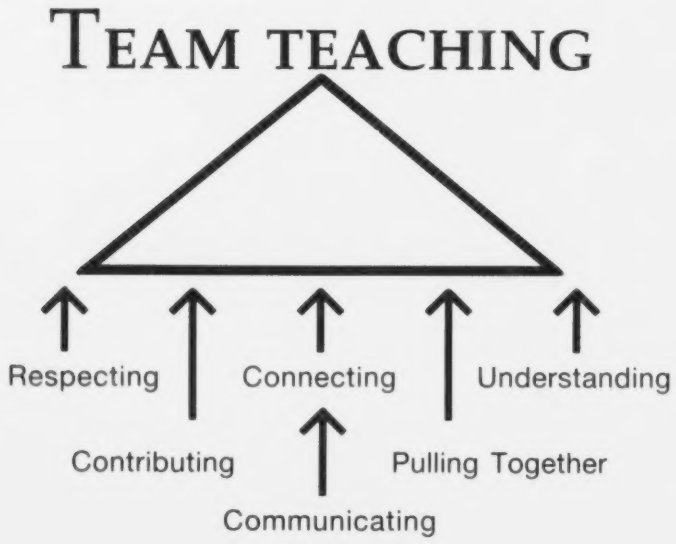
Adults play many different roles in early childhood programs. Directors, supervisors and principals perform administrative duties. Head teachers, classroom and home-based teachers plan the children's program and make on-the-spot group management decisions. Teacher assistants and aides, along with volunteers and community resource people, teach children and carry out other supportive activities under the guidance of the head teacher. Social workers, therapists, and health care professionals work with children individually and in groups. Cooks, bus drivers and custodians come in contact with children and contribute to their learning. Parents are children's first teachers and the most significant force in their lives.

Together, ALL are members of the early childhood teaching team.

WHAT IS TEAM TEACHING?

Team teaching in early childhood settings involves adults working together to enhance children's development and learning. Although each person has certain responsibilities unique to their position, team members combine their efforts to achieve success.

Example: *In early childhood classrooms, head teachers plan the children's program, other team members also contribute ideas. Everyone helps keep the environment safe, stimulating, and prepared. Once the children arrive, all the adults interact with them in meaningful ways.*



WHAT DOES TEAM TEACHING LOOK LIKE ?

Imagine yourself visiting three early childhood classrooms -- here is what you see.

Classroom #1: Out on the playground you observe two children arguing over a jumprope. The teacher aide, standing near-by, watches them for a few moments. Then she walks over to the head teacher, who is several yards away, and informs him of the difficulty. The head teacher stops what he is doing and moves over to help the children in conflict.

Classroom #2: The children and adults are just arriving. A note is taped to the door addressed to the 'parent volunteer.' It reads: "We'll be in by 9:15. In the meantime, please set up the easel and the paints. Then clean the guinea pig cage. (There is fresh newspaper underneath the table). Today you'll be taking children to and from the bathroom. Once that's done please snip 25 plastic straws into inch-size pieces for children to string tomorrow. At the end of the day help children pack their knapsacks for the ride home. Thanks."

Classroom #3: The head teacher is helping several children set up for snack. A parent volunteer is working at a table with four children, using a scale to weigh fruits and vegetables. Other children are working independently in the block area and in a pretend store. The teacher aide is helping a child at the easel put her name on her paper. Just then, an argument breaks out in the blocks. The aide looks up, sees that the other adults are busy, and steps in to help the children resolve their differences.

Messages about adult roles and the value of each adult is different in these three settings.

Classroom #1: In this classroom, the head teacher has total responsibility for classroom instruction and for keeping order among the children. The role of the aide, for whatever reason, has been reduced to simply watching children, not actually teaching them. The teacher and aide are not functioning as a mutually supportive team.

Classroom #2: The parent volunteer in this setting is not a highly valued member of the teaching team. He or she is assigned maintenance jobs only. None of these tasks involve any genuine interactions with the children or actual teaching responsibility. Chances are that both the children and other adults in the program realize the difference in status among the adults working here. This is not true team teaching.

Classroom #3: All three adults share responsibility for interacting with the children and for teaching them. Maintaining order and safety in the classroom are also shared tasks. Children can look to each grown-up for support and guidance. This illustrates the true spirit of team teaching in early childhood programs.

TEAM TEACHING BENEFITS

Adult Benefits

When adults work together as a team:

- ❒. There are more hands available to help in all aspects of classroom life.
- ❒. Back-up support is present in problem or emergency situations.
- ❒. Classrooms can continue to function effectively even when one member is absent.
- ❒. Ideas generated for the program are greater in number and variety.
- ❒. Stress is reduced because problems are shared.
- ❒. There is an opportunity for adults to grow through observation and interaction with other adults.
- ❒. They share the joy of watching young children learn.

Child Benefits

When adults work together as a team children receive:

- ❒. A richer program.
- ❒. A more consistent program.
- ❒. More individualized attention.
- ❒. Models of positive interpersonal interactive relationships.

Program Benefits

When adults work together as a team:

❒. There is more communication among various aspects of the program.

❒. The team can accomplish more than one person is able.

❒. Complex problems can be addressed in more comprehensive ways.

TEAM TEACHING CHECKLIST

Head Teacher Self-Check

- ❒. Welcome participants to the classroom.
- ❒. Select activities for participants to carry out that don't entail many potential discipline problems.
- ❒. Capitalize on the interests and strengths of participants in the classroom.
- ❒. Assign participants to teaching as well as maintenance tasks.
- ❒. Give participants choices of what they might like to do.
- ❒. Go over the routine for the day.
- ❒. Go over the basic ground rules for the classroom.
- ❒. Give specific directions to participants so they can feel competent and successful.
- ❒. Introduce participants to the children.
- ❒. Check-in periodically with participants during the session to get their reactions and to offer on-the-spot guidance.
- ❒. Offer feedback to participants at the end of the session. Praise their accomplishments and provide suggestions for problems that may have arisen.
- ❒. Thank participants for their assistance.

Participant Self-Check

❒. Arrive on time.

❒. Wear comfortable, washable clothing.

❒. Find out your responsibilities for the day.

❒. Ask questions if you are unfamiliar with an activity, procedure or routine.

❒. Interact with children both indoors and outside.

❒. Position yourself in activity areas so you can see all that is going on.

❒. Remain alert to potential safety problems - take action in unsafe situations.

❒. Tell the head teacher if you have any difficulties carrying out your responsibilities.

❒. During circle time, participate with the group leader, singing songs, doing the motions and so forth. Assist children who need help getting involved.

❒. Let the head teacher know if you have to leave the room for any reason.

❒. Suggest ideas for activities and routines.

❒. Remain for the entire time you are assigned.

TEAM TEACHING: HELPING CHILDREN LEARN

Young children need encouraging, accepting, stimulating, flexible environments in which to grow and learn. It is the adults, working together, who create environments like these. They do it, using the following strategies.

Encourage children to explore and to experiment with materials in their own ways. Allow them to try things out, to discover, to investigate, to find new means to use an object or material. Avoid taking over from children. Also, do not insist that children play with something in only one way. Instead, help children be creative and think for themselves.

Allow children to be as independent as they are able. Encourage children to pour their own juice, paste their own project, and get involved in clean-up. Emphasize participation, not perfection. This increases children's feelings of competence.

Use words to describe what children have done or learned. Say things like, "You used the square blocks to build your house," or, "You've put the pink shells in one pile and the brown ones in another."

Invite children to use words to describe their experiences and ideas. Make comments such as, "You found a new way to build a bridge. Tell me how you did it."

Help children elaborate on their play. Add new props or ask open-ended questions like, "You built a barn with a fence. What else might you put on your farm?"

Encourage children to make decisions. Give children choices such as, "Do you want the green paper or the white?" and "What do you want to put away next?"

Invite children to make predictions. Ask them "What do you think will happen next?" and "What will happen if...?" Then allow them to try their ideas.

Ask children to evaluate their predictions and decisions. Talk with children about their reactions. "You thought the stopper would sink. What happened?" Or, "You chose the green paper. How did you like it?" Or, "You used tape to make it stick. How did that work.?"

Encourage children to try more than one way to solve a problem. Say to children, "you figured out how to make that stick together. Now, try it another way. Or, "Let's see how many different ways you can carry the beanbags without using your hands." Also, as children play together, point out the different approaches they use. For example, "Dana, you thought children could share the dough by dividing it. Mario, you thought children could take turns. You each have a different idea about sharing."

ADULTS SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER

❒. Inform the head teacher of materials that are damaged, incomplete or broken.

❒. Include children in conversations with other adults. Save conversations that are just for adults for other times.

❒. Share information with one another that could enhance children's learning.

TEAM TEACHING: HELPING CHILDREN GET ALONG

Early childhood is a time for adults to help children find joy in being with others. Young children want and need contact with people. Yet they have much to learn about human interactions. They are just discovering how to express themselves, how to make friends, and how to treat others fairly. Team members promote positive peer relationships when they use the following strategies.

Emphasize cooperation rather than competition. Say things like "Let's all work together to clean-up the blocks." Don't say, "Let's see who can clean-up faster, the boys or the girls." Teach children the satisfaction that comes from working together.

Help children learn each other's names. Children feel more comfortable making contact with potential friends whose names they know. Use children's names often and play games that involve them learning each other's names. Continue doing these things all year long.

Talk to children about their emotions. Use words to describe the emotions you observe in children. Examples are "You look happy" and "You seem angry." The first step for children in dealing with their emotions is knowing what they are. Simple statements by adults, in which no judgement of right or wrong is made, help children recognize the many different emotions they experience each day.

Help children express their emotions to others. Suggest words to children that fit the situation. For example, Leroy could be advised to say: "Claudia, I wasn't finished yet," or "Claudia, it makes me mad when you grab." Ask children questions to get them to describe how they feel (i.e. "Marco took your pliers. Did you like that?" or "How did that make you feel?").

Point out to children how their behavior affects others. When children do something kind, point out the positive outcomes (i.e. "You gave Seungwon some dough. She's smiling, that made her happy."). If actions are hurtful, help children recognize that too. (i.e. "You pushed Marvin off the swing. He's crying, that made him sad.").

Encourage children to resolve disagreements. Allow children to work things out for themselves if they are able. Remain nearby to offer assistance as needed. Avoid simply separating children when disagreements occur. This deprives them of valuable practice in learning the art of compromise and negotiation.

ADULTS SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER

- ❒. Share with one another observations about particular children's interactions with peers.
- ❒. Generate ideas for promoting children's social relationships.
- ❒. Be on the look-out for children who could be friends but have not discovered each other yet. Make observations known so other adults can facilitate such interactions.
- ❒. Interact with each other in a warm, respectful manner as a model for children.

TEAM TEACHING: KEEPING TRACK OF CHILDREN'S NEEDS, INTERESTS, AND PROGRESS

Keeping accurate records of children's learning is important. Team members use this knowledge to build on what children know and to address gaps in their understanding. No one adult can monitor all the children, all the time. This is a group effort in which every member of the team participates.

Observe children's play carefully. As you interact with children, watch what they say and do. Note their interests, needs, abilities, and words. Later, write a brief record of your observations.

Pick certain child-behaviors to watch for each day. This will keep your observations more focused. Be sure to make observations in all areas of child development -- physical, social, emotional, language, and cognitive.

Describe children's behavior in objective words. Do this whether you are writing or talking. Focus on exactly what the child said or did. Avoid using judgmental terms such as 'hyper,' 'stubborn,' or 'naughty'.

Poor:	Otis is greedy.	Marsu is a bad girl.
Better:	Otis ate nine crackers.	Marsu said, "NO!" when asked to pick up toys.

Talk over your observations of children with other participants. Discuss children's reactions to activities, their questions and comments, their interests and concerns. Cross-check for accuracy. Make notes of future observations to carry out for individual children.

Keep samples of children's artwork, dictated stories, and writing to supplement your observations. Periodically go through these samples to get a sense of how children have changed over time.

Periodically share your observations of children's development with parents. Help them to get a clear picture of their child's progress over the year. Emphasize children's strengths and give parents ideas for how to support their children's learning at home.

Keep confidential what goes on in the classroom. Do not discuss children, families, or other practitioners with your friends or family. This information is private. Do not discuss children with colleagues in public places. There is no way to know who might overhear you on the bus, at a restaurant, or at the supermarket.

ADULTS SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER

- ❒. Discuss children before or after the session, not in front of them.
- ❒. Focus observation on one child each day. Combine your observations at the end of the day to get a more complete picture of that child.
- ❒. 'Catch' each other using inappropriate labels to describe certain children. Develop more objective ways to talk about each others' actions.
- ❒. Stop each other from discussing children in public places.

COMMUNICATION AMONG TEAM MEMBERS: DIRECTING ADULTS

In every classroom it is necessary for adults to talk to each other about how to get work done. It is hard for adults to complete tasks successfully if they are uncertain about how to proceed. Making sure directions are clear is one way to help people feel more confident and competent in carrying out classroom jobs.

State directions in positive terms, not negative ones.

Poor: *"Don't leave the brushes in the paint."*

Better: *"Wash the brushes."*

Be specific, not general.

Poor: *"Do something about that mess."*

Better: *"Put all the toys on the shelf."*

Be definite, not vague or tentative.

Poor: *"How about standing near the door?"*

"Wouldn't you like to stand near the door?"

Better: *"Please stand near the door."*

Use commonly understood words, not jargon. Define terms people might not know.

Poor: *"Use a whole language approach when you are writing down the children's stories."*

"You'll be writing experience stories with the children."

Better: *"You'll be writing down children's ideas about the field trip. Write down children's exact words. Don't correct them or tell them what to say."*

Be polite and respectful, not demanding or demeaning.

Poor: Interrupting, sighing, looking away, using a harsh or sing-song tone, using baby talk, and talking too fast or too slow.

Better: Saying please and thank you, smiling, looking at the person, and talking in a normal tone of voice at a natural speed.

Give accurate, complete directions. Offer reasons for what people are being asked to do.

Poor: *"Stand closer to the climber."*
"Sit with the children at circle time."

Better: *"Stand closer to the climber so you can steady children who need help."*

"Sit with the children at circle time. If a child gets restless, move closer and touch him gently. That helps children refocus on the story."

Check for understanding.

Poor: Assuming that people know what you mean.

Better: Asking people if they have questions and watching to see if your directions have been understood. Restating your directions in different words if necessary or repeating them and providing a demonstration of what you mean.

Avoid overwhelming people with too many directions at once.

Poor: Giving all your directions at one time and assuming people will remember them.

Better: Giving directions a few at a time and offering reminders periodically.

Acknowledge when people try to follow your directions.

Poor: Ignoring or taking people's efforts for granted.

Expressing appreciation only when the person carries out directions perfectly.

Better: Recognizing people's attempts. Letting them know you appreciate them.

ADULTS SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER

❒. Expect to give directions to others throughout the day.

❒. Expect to receive directions from others throughout the day.

❒. Tell fellow team members if their directions seem unclear to you or to others.

❒. As a team, identify program procedures that are confusing or vague. Work together to clarify these.

❒. Write out the directions for complex procedures agreed on by the team. Make sure team members have access to these rather than relying on people simply to remember them.

TEAM TEACHING: DEVELOPING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN

For children to feel valued in early childhood settings, they must experience warm, affectionate relationships with the adults they meet there. Helping children develop positive feelings about themselves is the responsibility of every member of the teaching team.

Show children you enjoy being with them. Greet children, smile at them, invite children to play with you. Enthusiastically accept children's invitations to play.

Place yourself at children's eye level when talking to them. Squat, stoop, or kneel so children can see your face and you can look at theirs.

Listen carefully to what children have to say. Show your interest through eye contact, smiling, and nodding. Encourage children to elaborate on what they are saying with statements like, "*Then what happened?*" and "*Tell me more.*" Such remarks help children feel important and interesting.

Speak to children directly. Avoid shouting at children or calling to them across the room. Face-to-face interactions are more personal and easier for children to understand.

Get involved with children. Play with children and talk to them about their play. Take on the roles children assign to you (e.g., becoming the baby in pretend play or being the 'caller' in a game). Play by the children's rules as you understand them and participate fully, taking turns, running or doing whatever else is required.

Avoid using children's names to mean stop, no, and don't. Nothing is more personal to a child than his or her name. When adults shout "*Tony*" or "*Allison*" as a reprimand, children experience a negative sense of self-worth. Rather than using children's names in this way, give them specific directions. Also, use children's names often in positive circumstances to build their good feelings of self.

'Catch' children being good. Point out to children the appropriate things you see them do -- sharing, comforting a friend, helping in the classroom, remembering to do something, waiting their turn. Too often adults take these behaviors for granted. When practitioners notice and take pleasure in children's positive acts they help children feel good about themselves. They also increase the likelihood that children will repeat those behaviors in the future.

ADULTS SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER

- ❒. Work together to complete maintenance tasks before the children arrive, so all adults are available to interact with the children.

- ❒. Avoid interrupting adult/child interactions.

- ❒. Offer assistance to other adults as necessary, so they can complete conversations and interactions with individual children.

- ❒. Remind one another of promises made to children such as reading a particular story later or remembering who gets the next turn on the computer.

TEAM TEACHING: HELPING CHILDREN FOLLOW RULES

Rules are guides for behavior. They tell children what to do, versus what not to do. When all the members of the early childhood team work together, they create a safe, predictable environment in which children know that everyone's rights are respected and protected. If teamwork is missing, children become confused and less able to figure out which behaviors are allowed and which are not. Adults help children follow rules when they use the techniques listed below.

Make only a few important rules for children to follow. Create rules to maintain safety, to protect property and the rights of others. Only make rules important enough to enforce every single time they apply. If a problem behavior does not fit these criteria, no rule should be set.

Give children reasons for why certain actions are allowed or not allowed. Reasons help rules make sense. They establish a connection between the child's behavior and issues of safety, protection of property, and protection of people's rights. Examples are, "*I can't let you hit. Hitting hurts.*" and "*Draw on your own paper. That one is Latoya's and she wants to finish it herself.*"

Tell children what to do, instead of what not to do. Children are most successful at following positive rules. "*Put your hands in your pockets,*" is easier for children to understand and remember than, "*Don't poke her.*" Likewise, "*Walk in the hall*" is better than "*Don't run.*"

Remind children of the rules often. Remember that young children forget rules from day to day and situation to situation. For instance, if you see a child running inside, say matter of factly, "Remember to walk." Don't say, "How many times have I told you not to run?" or "You know better than to run inside." These comments fail to teach children what to do and do not help them remember the next time.

When children break rules, show or help them to understand how to comply. If a child runs inside, have him go back and walk. If a child hits to show she is angry, have her get a wet rag to soothe the victim or practice describing her feelings. In each case, have the child practice a more appropriate alternate action.

ADULTS SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER.

❒. Talk together about what rules should be made.

❒. Come to some agreement about how the rules will be interpreted and how they will be enforced.

❒. Communicate with other adults during the day about rules set with individual children.

❒. At the end of the day, discuss ways to promote children's positive actions.

❒. At the end of the day, brainstorm solutions to children's problem behaviors.

COMMUNICATION AMONG TEAM MEMBERS: GIVING & RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Feedback involves giving information to others about how you are perceiving and reacting to their behavior. Sharing feedback is an important aspect of team teaching. It is a good way for members of the team to establish open channels of communication and make decisions about what to maintain and what to change about their performance. The hallmarks of constructive feedback are honesty and thoughtfulness.

State feedback in terms of people's behavior, not their personality or physical characteristics.

Poor: "*Your accent is hard for children to understand.*"

Better: "*Talk slowly so children can better understand your directions.*"

Tell the person what to do, not what <u>not</u> to do.

Poor: "*You shouldn't yell to children across the room.*"

Better: "*It would be more effective to approach the children directly and then talk to them in your normal speaking voice.*"

State feedback as your perception, not as absolute fact.

Poor: "*You make children feel uncomfortable when you hover over them.*"

Better: "*The child looked uncomfortable when you stood over him.*"

Make your feedback specific, not general.

Poor: "*Act more confident next time.*"

Better: "*Act more confident. Look at him directly and speak in a normal tone of voice. Don't whisper.*"

Phrase feedback in terms of 'more' or 'less,' not 'always' or 'never.'

Poor: "*You never smile.*"

Better: "*You only smiled once or twice during the story. Try smiling more often.*"

Include the reasons for your reaction as part of your feedback.

Poor: "*It bothered me when you left the room.*"

Better: "*It bothered me when you left the room. I wasn't sure you'd be back in time for the story.*"

PITFALLS TO AVOID WHEN GIVING FEEDBACK

Constructive feedback helps adults improve their work with children. The best outcomes result when the people giving feedback avoid the following mistakes.

Delaying feedback. Putting off feedback because it is uncomfortable makes matters worse. Little problems grow into big ones. Offer feedback frequently and in a timely fashion.

Using feedback only in a crisis. Feedback should be a natural part of the daily routine. This makes it seem less threatening and more useful. Use feedback to examine day-to-day events as well as very challenging ones.

Focusing on corrective feedback only. People reject feedback that is always negative. Offer a balance of positive and corrective observations. Make a feedback 'sandwich;' start with a positive remark, follow with corrective feedback, and follow that with another positive comment.

Giving too much feedback at once. Having too many things to change is overwhelming and may result in no change at all. Pick one skill to focus on. Start with behaviors easiest to correct (e.g. towering over children). Gradually, work up to more challenging tasks (e.g. avoiding solving children's problems for them).

Not following-up on feedback given or received. When getting feedback, develop a plan for making necessary changes and for how you will determine success. When giving feedback, periodically comment on the person's progress. Compliment positive results-- offer ideas and encouragement related to difficulties.

ADULTS SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER

- ❒. Offer feedback to one another daily.
- ❒. Involve all team members in feedback sessions.
- ❒. Use feedback to compliment a person's performance.
- ❒. Tell team members a goal you have for yourself in the classroom. Ask them for suggestions about how to achieve it and feedback on your progress.
- ❒. Use oral and written feedback, on-the-spot and later in the day.
- ❒. Identify a problem more than one adult is having (e.g., getting children involved in clean-up). As a group, brainstorm strategies you all might try. Put your plan into action. Later, get together and give each other feedback on your progress.
- ❒. Share feedback in groups and in private. Group feedback is best suited to describing a person's strengths and for addressing common problems. Feedback should be given privately when it involves persistent difficulties, unethical actions, and personal conflicts between two team members.

INVOLVING PARENTS AS MEMBERS OF THE TEACHING TEAM

Much of what every child learns has its beginnings in the home. That is where children first develop emotions and values. Home is where children learn to walk, talk, and make sense of their world. Even when children become involved in early childhood settings, family influences remain strong. For these reasons, effective early childhood programs include parents as partners in the educational process.

Parent/practitioner partnerships work best when both families and professionals believe they have much to share with one another. Building a sound connection between program and home begins with honest, sincere communication. Such communication is two-way. Parents contribute information about their child's joys, fears, needs, interests, background and family experiences. Practitioners share their understanding of child development and teaching. Combined, these two points of view offer a more complete picture of the child. As a result, it is possible to create more comprehensive and individualized learning experiences for children.

In addition, when parents and practitioners work together, they can do some of the same activities at home and in the program. The more consistent adults are, the more secure children feel. And when children feel secure, they are more likely to explore, experiment, and learn.

Parents vary in how willing or able they are to take part in early childhood programs. They also differ in what ways they wish to be included. There is no one best method of parent involvement. Therefore early childhood programs should offer a variety of means for parents to become a part of their child's early education.

Examples of parent involvement activities include face-to-face contacts such as home visits, program orientation meetings, parent-teacher conferences, family-centered social events, workshops and parent participation in the classroom. For some families, this includes photos of their child participating in a particular activity in the program or a phone call home which describes some aspect of their child's day. Written items such as notes to and from home, program newsletters, program handbooks and brochures, parent surveys, and suggestion boxes are other good ways to promote parent/practitioner communication.

COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

Regardless of which way parents choose to become part of the program, there are some basic things teachers and other program staff can do to help parents feel valued.

Be friendly to parents. Greet parents by name and smile when you see them. When parents talk to you, listen carefully. Show your interest by asking related questions and by thanking them for talking with you.

Learn a few words of greeting in the language of each family in your group.

Treat parents as individuals. Communicate with them on a one to one basis as well as in groups.

Familiarize parents with a typical day in the program. It helps them feel more comfortable, if they can envision how their child spends his or her time away from home.

Let parents know about goals and expectations in your program. Offer examples of related activities parents might see or hear about.

On the spur of the moment, write a one or two line note about a child's positive program experience. Send this 'happy' note home with the child as a keepsake for parents.

Emphasize collaboration during parent conferences. Invite parents to help set goals for children's learning, then discuss mutual strategies for furthering these aims. Provide parents with sample questions they might ask about the program as well as examples of questions you might ask them. Answer parent's questions directly but tactfully.

Plan several simple forms of contact throughout the year. Don't rely on one colossal event.

Have an open-door policy for your program. Invite parents to visit frequently and without an appointment.

Invite parents to make suggestions for program activities. Also, ask them to evaluate the program periodically.

Design on-site parent activities to accommodate family's varying lifestyles and schedules. Repeat events more than once, vary meeting times, organize transportation networks and provide childcare.

Provide information about child development and learning to parents in a take-home form. For instance, books, pamphlets, audio cassettes, and video-tapes could be made available through a parent lending library.

Create home-based alternatives to on-site participation. Preparing materials at home, translating written items into their own language, reacting to activity plans, mending toys or dress-up clothes, and comparing prices for certain items from store to store, are a few examples of what parents might do.

Stay in touch with parents who seem unresponsive. Avoid stereotyping them as uncaring or uncooperative. Continue to offer simple, easy to carry out suggestions for home-based participation. Keep the input from the program as positive as possible and make few demands. This gives parents a favorable impression of early education and may encourage them to get more involved in the future.

COMMUNICATION AMONG TEAM MEMBERS: RESOLVING INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS

In any team teaching situation, there are times when team members disagree or annoy one another. Such differences are to be expected, but must be handled with sensitivity. The key to resolving conflicts between adults is open, honest communication.

If an adult in the program does something that bothers you, bring it to that person's attention directly and soon. Do not put off talking about it or expect that person to recognize the problem without a clear sign from you that something is wrong. Hold back from complaining to fellow staff members or using the grapevine to let the person know you are unhappy.

Give yourself a cooling off period if you need it. Wait until you are calm before you confront someone whose behavior offends you.

Consider time and place when bringing up your concerns. Talk over disagreements privately. Wait until neither you nor the other person are distracted or absorbed in something that must be done. Give yourself enough time to discuss the problem thoroughly and to allow the other person to respond adequately. If such a time is not immediately available, work out when you can get together.

Describe complaints in terms of your own needs. Try not to accuse or blame the other person. Such remarks cause people to be defensive and to stop listening.

Poor: *"You never follow-through on the limits I set with children in the morning session."*

Better: *"I feel upset when I set limits and come back the next day to find you didn't enforce them in the afternoon. It bothers me that we don't have more consistency throughout the day. I'd like to talk about ways to make the situation more comfortable for me."*

First, begin your message with the word *"I,"* not *"You."* **Second**, identify your emotions related to the problem. **Third**, talk about developing a solution as a way to relieve your feelings of anxiety, anger or discomfort. Make clear that, *"A problem exists that is bothering me,"* not, *" I have a problem with you."*

If you are unable to resolve a conflict with another team member, ask a supervisor to mediate the disagreement. Sometimes the addition of a third party brings clarity to the situation. This should be a person who will not take sides, but will listen fairly and help break the deadlock.

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If you have any questions regarding this publication, please call the Early Childhood Education and Parenting Office at (517) 373-8483.